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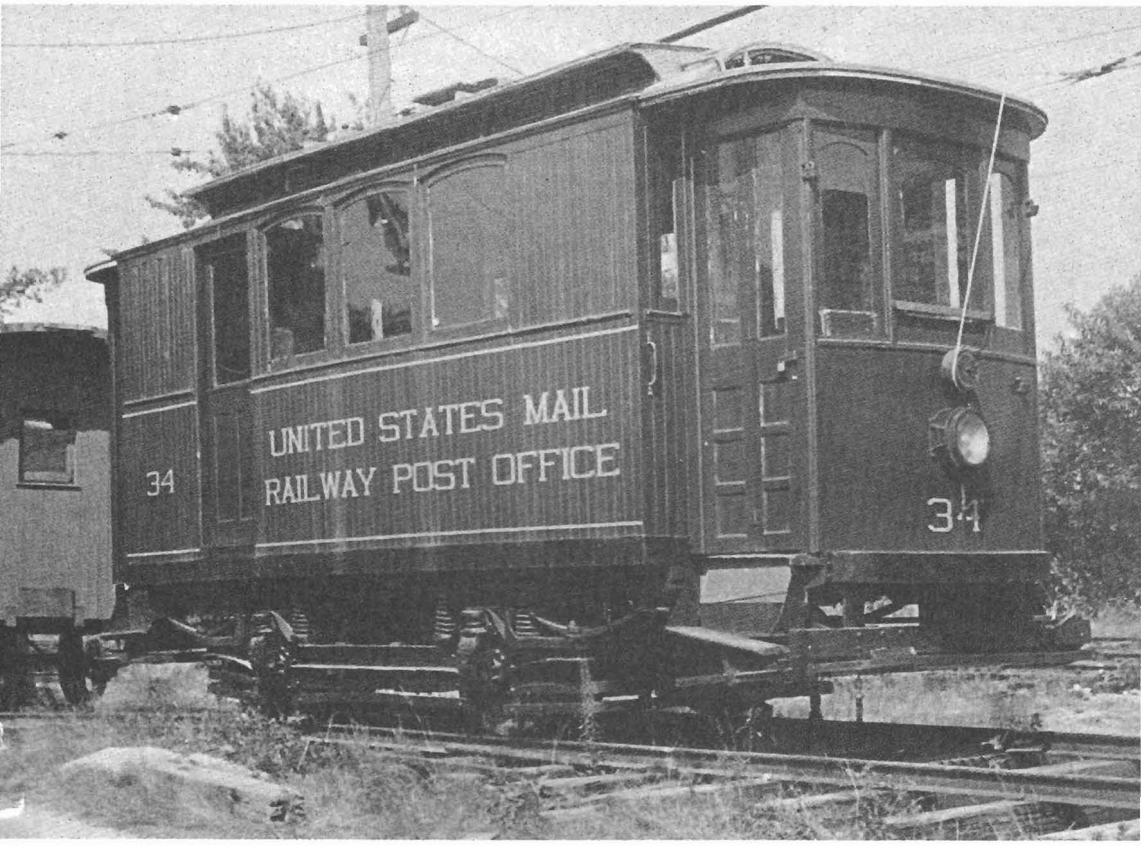
# RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE




## 1864-1977

# THE RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE

By Lyle K. Rice

*Born near the Canadian border on 13 March 1905, in the town of Derby, Vermont, the author says about himself:*

*Even before I graduated from Orleans High School, I started to work part-time in the Orleans post office. With no chance of advancement in Orleans, I took the railway mail examination in 1927 and received an appointment to that service in May, 1930. I stayed with the rail mail service for 24 years, but it was already in a decline. So, when I was offered a chance to transfer to the Rutland, Vermont, post office, I started working there on 1 April 1954. On 2 July 1965, I retired as assistant superintendent of mails, completing a total of nearly 42 years of postal service.*

*Retiring at age 60 gave me an opportunity to serve my community by being a representative from Rutland to the State Legislature, now for the tenth term.*

*It has been nine years since there was an enroute rail distribution of the mails. I hope this story of the Railway Mail Service will one day be enlarged, while there are still persons who remember details of this significant segment of our national and local heritage.*

What became known as the Railway Mail Service had its beginning during the Civil War, in the year 1864. Its purpose was to sort mail enroute, carrying it from one distribution point to another on the way toward its final destination. In Vermont, Bennington was, apparently, one of the distribution points. The best detailed information about the history of the Railway Mail Service is to be found in a so-called *Paste Order Book*, beginning in 1909. It is a very valuable resource, because it contains information for railway mail clerks, postmasters and railroad companies in great detail, with orders on a weekly baisis and more often, if needed. The orders were pasted in those books and made available, especially at headquarters or starting points of the railway post office runs, throughout the country. Finding a *Paste Order Book* for Vermont has been a tremendous help in reconstructing some of the history of this service that has been out of existence since 1977.

*1910 PERIOD*

Presumably, the railway post office cars were constructed by railroad companies within requirements outlined by government regulations. The short runs naturally required less space. In these earlier days the mail to be carried was weighed as the basis for the amount of revenue a railroad company would receive.

It has been difficult to establish the motive for the many listed Railway Post Office runs between given points in Vermont and adjacent New England areas. The earliest available information indicates that a Frederick H. Holdridge was employed on the route from Richford, Vermont, to Concord, New Hampshire. He was a resident of the town of Irasburg in 1883, about 20 years after the Railway Mail Service came into being. A railroad buff knows that rails were laid between many different points in Vermont. Of the routes in existence back in 1910 most had some sort of RPO service. Notable exceptions were short lines that ran between Leicester Junction, Vermont, and Fort Ticonderoga, New York; Bristol and New Haven Junction; White River Junction and Woodstock; Wilmington and Hoosac Tunnel. Regardless of these lapses, every railroad had a contract to carry mail.

Short runs that were serviced were the Richford to St. Albans and the Newport to Richford. These runs used no more than 20 feet of space in a railroad car. Only one clerk was employed in each case. An example of a long run was from Portland, Maine, to Swanton, Vermont, which covered 233 miles and required 11 hours of running time. The mail cars were illuminated for these long runs by gas lights, as the mail was handled largely at night.

## X Alburg & Boston R. P. O. E.M.C.

(Rutland and Fitchburg R. R.'s. 270.90 miles. Route 103021, Alburg to Bellows Falls; route 104055; and route 104021 part, South Ashburnham to Boston.)

| B164 | B54¶ | B162 | A52¶ | ☞ 10—4—09 | B53¶ | B165 | B159 | A51¶ | A51¶ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 7 10 | Le. **Montreal, P. Q.**.....Ar. | | | | 7 30 | 7 30 |
| | | | 9 00 | Le. Alburg, Vt.....Ar. | | | | 5 20 | 5 20 |
| | | | 10 10 | Ar. Burlington, Vt.....Le. | | | | 4 10 | 4 10 |
| | 8 20 | | 10 20 | Le. Burlington, Vt.....Ar. | 4 30 | | | 4 00 | 4 00 |
| | 10 00 | | ..... | Leicester Junction, Vt.... | 3 00 | | | .... | .... |
| | 10 45 | | 0 10 | Ar. Rutland, Vt.....Le. | 2 15 | | | 2 10 | 2 10 |
| | B154 | | A152 | | B153 | | | D151 | F151 |
| 2 05 | 11 00 | 6 05 | 0 30 | Le. Rutland, Vt.....Ar. | 2 05 | 4 45 | 8 30 | 1 50 | 1 50 |
| 3 40 | 1 05 | 8 15 | 2 25 | Ar. Bellows Falls, Vt.....Le. | 0 05 | 3 10 | 6 40 | 11 30 | 11 50 |
| B502 | B518 | B514 | A520 | | B515 | B517 | B513 | B505 | E573 |
| 3 50 | 1 25 | 8 20 | 2 30 | Le. Bellows Falls, Vt.....Ar. | 11 55 | 2 35 | 6 30 | 11 00 | 11 50 |
| 4 38 | 2 13 | 9 08 | 3 20 | Ar. Keene, N. H... .....Le. | 11 11 | 1 48 | 5 46 | 10 13 | 11 03 |
| 4 42 | 2 17 | 9 10 | 3 23 | Le. Keene, N. H... .....Ar. | 11 07 | ..... | 5 43 | 10 13 | 10 59 |
| 5 34 | 3 17 | 10 04 | 4 16 | Winchendon, Mass..... | 10 22 | 1 07 | 4 58 | 9 33 | 10 16 |
| ..... | 3 35 | 10 19 | 4 35 | South Ashburnham, Mass | 10 03 | ..... | 4 39 | 9 14 | 10 00 |
| 6 07 | 3 58 | 10 37 | 5 00 | Ar. Fitchburg, Mass.....Le. | 9 39 | 0 23 | 4 12 | 8 49 | 9 33 |
| | | | A20** | | | | | | |
| 6 10 | 4 05 | 10 40 | 5 20 | Le. Fitchburg, Mass.....Ar. | 9 35 | 0 20 | 4 08 | 8 44 | 9 28 |
| 6 32 | 4 29 | 11 02 | 5 46 | Ayer, Mass..... .... | 9 14 | 12 00 | 3 45 | 8 20 | 8 58 |
| ..... | 4 51 | ..... | ..... | Concord Junction, Mass . | ..... | ..... | .... | 7 55 | 8 26 |
| 7 40 | 5 45 | 12 00 | 7 00 | Ar. Boston, Mass.....Le. | 8 16 | 11 01 | 2 46 | 7 16 | 7 46 |

Burlington, Vt., and Keene, N. H., City mail distributed on trains 515, 153, and 53. **Tr. 520 (f).
Boston, Mass., City mail distributed on train 52-152-520-20.

## X Alburg & Albany R. P. O. W.B.F.

(Boston & Maine and Rutland R. R.'s. 197.06 miles. Route 103021 part, Alburg to Rutland, Vt.; route 103015 part, Rutland to North Bennington, Vt.; route 103018; route 103022; route 104021 part, Hoosick Jc. to Troy, N. Y.; and route 107106.)

| A52 | B56¶ | B64 | B54 | ☞ 6—21—09 | B57¶ | B65 | B59 | A51 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 10 35 | | Le. Alburg, Vt.....Ar. | | 7 55 | | |
| | | 11 50 | | Ar. Burlington, Vt.....Le. | | 6 40 | | |
| 10 20 | 4 00 | 12 00 | | Le. Burlington, Vt.....Ar. | 1 00 | 6 30 | | |
| ..... | 5 32 | ..... | | Leicester Jc., Vt... | 11 28 | 5 15 | | |
| 0 10 | 6 15 | 1 55 | | Ar. Rutland, Vt.....Le. | 10 45 | 4 40 | | |
| 0 20 | 6 20 | 2 05 | 10 55 | Le. Rutland, Vt.....Ar. | 10 35 | 4 30 | 8 30 | 2 00 |
| 1 50 | 8 00 | 3 30 | 0 30 | Ar. No. Bennington, Vt.Le. | 8 37 | 2 50 | 6 35 | 0 35 |
| 2 00 | 8 15 | 3 45 | 0 45 | Ar. Bennington, Vt.....Ar. | 8 45 | 3 00 | 6 45 | 0 45 |
| A851 | B857 | B865 | B853 | | B856 | B864 | B830 | A852 |
| 1 50 | 8 05 | 3 35 | 0 35 | Le. No. Bennington, Vt.Ar. | 8 33 | 2 45 | 6 30 | 0 35 |
| .... | .... | 3 47 | 0 48 | Ar. Hoosick Junc., N.Y.Le. | 8 21 | 2 32 | 6 15 | 0 16 |
| | | | B9 | | | | B30 | |
| .... | .... | 3 47 | 0 53 | Le. Hoosick Junc., N.Y.Ar. | 8 19 | 2 29 | 6 01 | 0 15 |
| 2 22 | .... | 4 02 | 1 13 | Johnsonville, N. Y. | ..... | 2 12 | 5 40 | ..... |
| 2 50 | 9 10 | 4 35 | 1 45 | Ar. Troy, N. Y.....Le. | 7 35 | 1 45 | 5 00 | 11 30 |
| | B762 | | | | B73 | | | |
| | 9 30 | | | Le. Troy, N. Y.....Ar. | 6 50 | | | |
| | 9 55 | | | Ar. Albany, N. Y.....Le. | 6 25 | | | |

* Summer service.
Burlington and Rutland, Vt., City mail distributed on trains 856 and 57.
New York City letter mail assorted by trains 52 and 851.
Authorized one line of 40′ car, Burlington, Vt., to Albany, N. Y. In use 50′, trs. 73 and 56.
Trs. 54 and 30, 29′ apartment car (f. w.).
Trs. 851 and 852, 26′ 4″ and 25′ 5″ apartment cars (f. w.).*
Trs. 864 and 865, 25′ and 22′ 5″ apartments.

Sample Schedules, which indicate miles, routes and times of departure and arrival.

*RMS ORGANIZATION*

Most of the information available about the national Railway Mail Service seems to be derived from the first decade of the 20th century. The service remained essentially the same for at least 50 years. Within the United States there were 15 divisions. Each division was divided into a number of districts. The First Division was comprised of the New England states. Within that division there were seven districts. One of these districts was located at White River Junction, Vermont, and it had charge of all runs within the states of Vermont and New Hampshire, as well as longer runs that terminated outside of Vermont. The division offices had control over the district offices and the top officials were located in Washington, D.C. The office of the First Division was located in Boston, Masschusetts, as were three of the district offices.

Each district office had a politically appointed person in charge. They were known first as chief clerks and later as district superintendents. These politically appointed persons usually came from one of the RPO lines within the district. As each administration changed in Washington, they would return to their former RPO line or organization and resume their seniority.

Each district office also had an assistant chief clerk or assistant superintendent. In the Vermont district this appeared not to be a political appointment,and once having attained the position the appointee remained there until retirement. The assistant chief really ran the day-to-day operation of the district and determined much of what took place within that district. Important changes were reviewed by the chief clerk and on up the line all the way to Washington.

In addition to the chief clerk and his assistant, the district office also employed several clerks. One of these was the lady stenographer. The duties of another clerk were that of examiner. For many years Allen O. Smith (the father of Rutland's auto dealer, Stewart Smith) held that position. Indications are that the White River Junction office probably had direct supervision over as many as 175 men. About 20 of these men would be the spare men or substitutes who replaced the regulars on vacation, sick leave or otherwise assigned. Railway mail officials were in complete charge of the transportation of mails and their orders went out to all of the railway post office employees, to postmasters within their district or division and to the railroads concerned with the transportation of the mails.

*HOW TO BECOME A RAILWAY MAIL CLERK*

First of all, to become a mail clerk it was necessary to inquire where and when examinations would be held. Notice of the several kinds of Civil Service examinations requiring written tests was posted in most post offices. If the vacant position were a minor one, it might be posted and the examination held at the office where the position was available. In that case, one of the post office clerks would be the examiner for the Civil Service Commission. In the case of the railway mail examinations, they would be held at a first class office and probably no more than one office in each county would be the designated location for this examination. It is interesting to note that many magazines and other publications carried advertisements by the Franklin Institute, located in Rochester, New York, offering courses which reputedly would be helpful in passing the railway mail examinations.

It might be months after the examination was held before a participant would learn about the rating earned. In earlier days, if the examination were taken at some point in the State of Vermont, a person was entitled to states rights and these rights were jealously guarded by the Vermont Congressman in Washington. Once the examination rating was received, it was then possible to write to the Civil Service Commission in Boston and inquire what the standing was on the Vermont list. A mark of 70 was considered a passing grade, but it was far better to be as close to 100 as possible. War veterans, of course, were given preference. In Vermont, an examination was held in 1927 but was not repeated until 1936, probably because the list established that year furnished as many prospects as were needed. A new list was supposed to be established every year, but apparently the commission did not find it necessary to follow its own regulations.

It now became a waiting game by the candidate for the mail service. The records would probably indicate that many lost interest and, in the end, declined appointments. However, if one passed with a very good rating, the day finally would come when the person would be notified to appear at White River Junction, the district office, for an assignment. The new clerk was then ordered to take "a run for instructions". Having done that, his seniority started from that date. As in most cases, where seniority prevailed, the number and importance of assignments were dependent upon experience. Advancement was dependent upon seniority in relation to Vermont vacancies.

*MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT IN THE RMS*

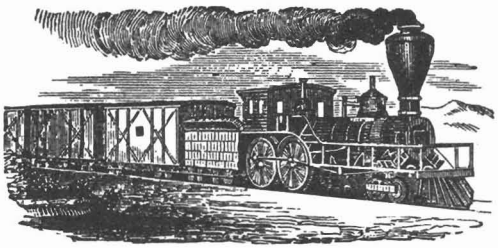
Probably not more than five persons were appointed to the Railway Mail Service each year with a Vermont assignment. If the original examination were not enough to deter an ambitious person, many other factors did. The first year of employment was a probation period that lasted one full year. During the year, if the employee expected to clear the probation period, there were basic examinations related to the needs of the service. For instance, there were 325 possible questions related to the postal laws and regulations. The examiner would select 20 from that total. Another examination related to what was called "space", and again one was expected to answer correctly 20 selected questions. The routing of mail was a real challenge. These were called "card case examinations". The minimum requirement was a passing mark of 97%. Failure to pass with that grade called for a re-examination within a given period of time. Failing that, there was a reduction in pay and, finally, dismissal.

There was also a merit system. An employee received merits for passing examinations with good marks. More were possible for sustained excellence of service. Likewise, de-merits would be received if there was a failure in the performance of assigned duties. These merits and de-merits were handed-out by the chief clerk at the district office. The chief clerk, however, was "one of the boys"; fairness and some leniency prevailed.

If employees became "surplus", as many did, they were entitled to stay in that capacity and accept assignments along with the substitutes, which their state rights entitled them. Some clerks would refuse a promotion because it meant going to the bottom of the list of chief clerks. Instead, senior clerks, refusing the advancement, preferred to remain a senior clerk with options to accept favorable assignments in that job category.

*THE PAY SCALE*

Through oral history obtained from retired railway mail clerk, Arthur J. Menard,* now 92 years old and living in New York, it was learned that in the 1910 period clerks were paid about $900.00 per year. There was no such thing, apparently, as sick leave and vacation. There certainly was no overtime. If a train were delayed, as they often were in those days, the rate of pay was still based upon the $900.00 per year and not upon the hours served on certain days.



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** A.J. Menard built a home and lived on Bellevue Avenue, Rutland, Vermont, when he was a mail clerk on the Burlington-Troy RPO run.*

Form 5195
SUBJECT:

**Railway Mail Service**

OFFICE OF CHIEF CLERK, DISTRICT #4

White River Junction, Vt.,
June 19, 1930

Assignment Order #866

L. K. Rice will be assigned as summer helperin Boston, Nashua & Keene Trs. 8218, 8219, 8224 and 8225 between Harrisville and Nashua City Station, commencing July 1 and continuing daily except Sunday until receipt of further instructions. Keys and Badge are enclosed for use in this assignment, for which he will forward receipt.

He will report for this duty via Tr. 266-72 and Tr. 5508 to Keene on June 30 and will run from Keene to Nashua and return to Harrisville for instructions the afternoon of June 30.

His headquarters will be designated as Harrisville, N.H. effective July 1.

J M Ashley
Chief Clerk.

G:M.
L. K. Rice
D. L. Park
H. D. Collins
Files.

A 30-minute run from Keene, New Hampshire to Harrisville, a summer helper assignment.

In later years, and as late at 1930, substitutes received no sick leave and no vacation pay, either. They were paid on an hourly basis and in that time frame of the '30s would receive what might be termed as overtime, but only at the same rate of pay as regular hours. In other words, even though he was assigned to cover the run of a regular clerk, there were no regular work hours. However, both regular clerks and substitutes were allowed a certain amount of expenses after being away from the starting point of their initial run. If away for a full 24 hours, an allowance for three meals and bed would be made. In 1930 this amounted to $3.00 per day. Usually, a night's lodging could be found for 50 cents and food was equally modest in price.

Some clerks, if they were assigned to an outbound run with only a few hours layover before the start of the return trip, would use the mail equipment to make a bed of sorts and stay right in the mail car. Usually, there was a restaurant at any starting or ending point, and the railroad customarily left mail cars attached to the heating hoses designed to keep passenger cars warm during the colder months. An RPO clerk, who lived near St. Johnsbury, Vermont, with a run from White River Junction to Newport and return, was known to sleep in the mail car each night and pack his sandwiches to last a full week.

In the 1930s the clerk in charge of an RPO run was, in effect, the timekeeper and reported the time on duty of the whole crew. This duty roster was a part of the trip report. The district office would compute the time and forward it to Boston. A clerk's pay would be mailed from a Boston office on the 15th and the last day of each month.

Clerks assigned to what were called the Class B runs (fewer hours per week) were due to work about six hours and 45 minutes each day. The other hour and 15 minutes were a part of time allowed for study and preparation of material used while on duty. If a clerk were assigned to a week-on, week-off schedule, it was usually arranged that he did not work even the full six hours and 45 minutes. As long as trains ran on time, he was a winner, but if a train ran late, the time saved other days was used to balance out the overtime. Thus, except for unusual circumstances, such as the 1927 flood, there was no overtime, as such, on most runs.

Some changes were made in the pay scale after 1930. Very few changes were made for many years after that. The pay system was still based upon so-called grades. A clerk's grade related to the amount of time, or years, devoted to the service. The grades ran from one through five for clerk's sorting mail on assigned railway runs. Grade one was paid at the rate of $1,850.00 per year. On a graduated scale, pay increased to a ceiling of $2,450.00 for grade five. When promoted to clerk in charge, the pay from the '30s on equalled $2,600.00 per year.

In the earlier years of the railway postal service a clerk was required to retire at age 62, whereas a post office clerk could work until age 65. The first retirements with an annuity began in 1921. Since no one had paid into the retirement fund, there was a standard annuity of $100.00 per month. In later years retirement annuity was based upon two factors: number of years served and an average of the best five years in salary.

*RPO ORGANIZATIONS*

The many runs between points were called organizations. In an organization with 32 men, there would usually be about 20 clerks and 12 clerks in charge. Each organization listed its personnel by seniority. Every time there was any change that affected the running time of the trains, or when service was reduced by the complete cancellation of some train runs, a reorganization became necessary. For many years the same runs were apparently maintained and the clerks with the most seniority could usually plan on making the same runs. With the depression of 1929 and the increase of passenger bus service and private vehicles, the railroad companies were forced to adjust. This meant that every few months, usually with the changes from daylight time to standard time and visa versa, there would be adjustments to train schedules. These adjustments also called for the reorganization of the mail runs and the clerks with the least seniority were required to make almost constant changes. Both the railroads and the government were looking for ways to save money. For a considerable length of time clerks

# SCHEDULE OF MAIL ROUTES

## No. 297

OCTOBER 28, 1938

# FIRST DIVISION

## RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE

COMPRISING

Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont,

Massachusetts, Rhode Island

and Connecticut

Under the Supervision of

JOHN F. DINAND

Superintendent, First Division

Post Office Building, Boston, Mass.

Telephone: Liberty 5600

By Direction of the General Superintendent

R. M. S.

R. M. S.—BOSTON, MASS. P. O. 10-28 38-3109.

with the least seniority were able to find available runs because of attrition through deaths and retirements. Then the 48-hour week was changed to a 44-hour week in 1931 and, and finally, still another change in 1936 to a 40-hour week. The lowering of the work week forestalled for a time the drastic changes that were inevitable.

Clerk assignments to runs were made in several different ways: substitutes in place of regular clerks, up-grading through seniority and replacements where a vacancy occurred, including transfers from one postal organization to another. Transfers were apparently more numerous in earlier days because of so many short runs in more remote areas. So, a substitute would usually accept the first possible vacancy and wait for a chance to change to a run within another organization which would allow him to be nearer his residence, or give him a run with more time off. Also, clerks assigned to the short runs were usually in Class A, which required more hours of work than the Class B runs. The latter automatically gave them more time off, which seemed to be the goal of all clerks.

Not all assignments in the Railway Mail Service were on the train runs. There were transfer offices (Rutland had one for many years) and terminals, which were established with the advent of the parcel post service. Men assigned to a terminal anxiously waited to acquire enough seniority to allow for a transfer to a train run. Also, as an added inducement, train runs paid a larger salary. Fortunately, the bigger terminals, which sorted both parcel post and third class mails, were located in other states. Vermonters were rarely assigned to duty out of state.

*REVENUE FOR THE RAILROADS*

The enroute sorting of the mails was certainly of great benefit in expenditing mail service throughout the country. It was also a source of revenue for the railroad companies. One of the earlier methods of determining revenue was to weigh the mail each day for 30 days. The information then became the basis for payment during the following eleven months.

Obviously, it took a great amount of time on the part of railroad employees and postal employees to determine a daily average of mail carried on a weight basis. Once the parcel post came into being, a change to a space system was needed. In the earlier days there appeared to have been no standard amount of space being used in a mail car but rather space was estimated upon the needs of runs between points. Anywhere from a 10-foot section of a car with a multiple use to 50 feet is in the records. In later years standards were set from 15 feet to 60 feet. Sometimes, a 30-foot space would be allotted. The mail might start out of Burlington toward Boston and presumably use only 15 feet of that space. From Rutland to Boston, however, the full 30 feet might be needed and utilized.

A similar sort of system came into use for bulk mail. The system was used when a train carried mail but had no mail car sorting unit; or it could be used when bulk mail was carried in another part of the train because it could not be accommodated in the mail car. In both of these cases, that sort of space was setup in three-foot units. The railroad company was paid for at least three feet, even though the car might carry only a small amount of mail. Every year at given locations, the railroad company would build a bin to certain specifications and the railroad employees, under the supervision of postal employees, would determine how many sacks, as well as parcels, that bin would accommodate. Then the number of sacks and parcels the bin would hold would be the equivalent of three feet of space. It would also serve to determine how many parcels would occupy the same amount of space as a sack. Usually, it took about 50 sacks to equal three feet. Also, an average of two or two-and-a-half parcels were the equal of one sack. At one time, when it was determined that seven parcels equaled three sacks, John H. Toohey* routinely instructed the baggage man to give him a count divisible by seven, since seven parcels were the equivalent of three sacks.

By agreement, the railroads carried mail in the baggage car. If the amount of mail carried on a certain day exceeded the predetermined space, the railroad

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**John H. Toohey lived on Strongs Avenue in Rutland, Vermont, and worked with the author.*

would exact additional revenue. In cases where the authorized space was exceeded and the clerk in charge had been so notified, the government was expected to pay for the extra space to the next junction point, even though the excess bulk mail had been dispatched at some railroad station in between. If there was still excess mail at the next junction, then the clerk in charge had an option to advise the railroad to reduce the load to the authorized amount by transferring the excess mail to the mail car itself, provided, of course, there was room available.

Very often, during the heavy mailing period at holiday time, the post office department would authorize a storage car unit between dispatch points. As long as that car was more that 50 per cent in use, the PO department would pay for a full length car of 60 feet. Upon the return trip, even if there was no mail to be carried, the railroad received pay for that car, unless it made some use of it for its own purposes. At junctions, transfer clerks determined how much mail was to be carried and not the clerk in charge in the mail car. At one time there were transfer offices at Burlington, Rutland and White River Junction. The Rutland transfer office employed as many as five men, since it operated around the clock, except for a few daylight hours on Sunday. The space used by those transfer offices was provided by the RR companies as part of their agreement.

*WRECKS, FLOOD WATERS, ROBBERIES AND PERSONAL MEMORIES*

Over the years there were many train wrecks that involved mail cars. The mail car was placed directly behind the engine. It might have 30 feet of the 60-foot car used for first class mail and the other half to accommodate parcels and bulkmail. The last head-on train wreck took place when two trains collided just south of Newbury, Vermont, on 30 October 1948. Each train had a mail car with three postal clerks at work. Five of the six clerks were injured but none was killed. Nevertheless, several were never able to return to duty.

The short-lived Highway Post Office service was related to the Railway Mail Service in that the enroute distribution was performed in the same way. The HPO sorting unit was leased by the post office department and the driver, therefore, was not a postal employee. The regular route of one particular HPO was from Burlington to White River Junction, via Barre and Williamstown Gulf. On the night of what became a fatal accident, the HPO was detoured through Northfield and Bethel and could not resume its regular route until it reached a point south of Randolph. The driver was not familiar with the road and part-way between Randolph and Bethel he lost control of the vehicle. In the resulting accident one arm was almost completely severed. before medical assistance became available, the driver bled to death.

Fewer persons who are alive today witnessed the 1927 flood. When it occurred, it abruptly interrupted the enroute distribution of the mails for several weeks, because of the washouts and dislocated tracks. Fortunately, no serious accidents occurred, as trains were halted when it became known that it was not safe to proceed. Between Rutland and Bellows Falls one train was stopped at East Wallingford and another at Cuttingsville. It then became the duty of local postmasters to take the mail into their custody and care for the postal employees wherever that became necessary. Interestingly, and perhaps to the satisfaction of the marooned clerks, they received pay until such time as they could return to their headquarters. In those days, since there was no overtime, the clerks were granted pay at their hourly rate, plus expenses, at the rate of three dollars per day, while detained.

All railway mail clerks were issued a mail key that would open any regular mail bag. Most were issued a gun, nominally a .38 Colt with a two-inch barrel. But getting ammunition was virtually impossible. At one time it was over ten years before ammunition was available. With that short barrel revolver one did not become an expert marksman with virtually no practice. Every clerk also had a badge with a number on it which indicated that he was a railway mail employee.

Mail train robberies were rare but occasionally stories were heard. One robbery took place at White River Junction and apparently was never solved. Another robbery related to an RPO from Portsmouth to Concord, New Hampshire. It seems the clerk on the run had his mail bags all locked and ready for delivery upon arrival at the railroad station. Since he lived at an area just outside

Form 5003
Revised March, 1930

# EXAMINATION STATEMENT

Name Lyle K. Rice

Alb & Bos, R. P. O.

Statement of Regular Examination

on Boston 1 by Scheme

Examined by Allan O. Smith

Date due

Date examined Dec. 14, 1932.

No. of Cards

Handled 1392 Per cent correct 99.71

Correct 1388 Time 50 mins.

Incorrect 4 Cards per minute 27

Unknown No. of separations 32

| EXAMINATION ON— | ASKED | ANSWERED | PER CENT |
|---|---|---|---|
| Space | 20 | 20 | 100 |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

CONDITION OF—

Schemes OK

Schedules OK

Book of Instructions OK

Registry Records

Commission No. 141 Permit 649

Badge No. 497

Keys.—L. A. No. 58095

Registry No.

Revolver (.....) No. 10251 OK

Ammunition container

Holster OK Belt OK

EXAMINATIONS ASSIGNED

Date

Date

Date

5—8797

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1930

*Chief Clerk, R. M. S.*

A "space" examination report sheet on postal laws and regulations. A score of 97% was required.

**The interior of a "60" mail car, where mail was sorted during the run, usually at night.**

of Concord, he made arrangements for a baggageman to unload his mail bags. Small post offices with surplus cash were sending their money that day to the Concord post office, via registered mail. When the bag, supposedly containing the registered letters, arrived at the post office the deposit surplus money letters were missing. Officials worked fast in solving the heist. First, they determined what employees were not on duty that day who might be in the area. The guilty clerk was apprehended. What he had done was to open the mail bag with his own key, steal the registered letters and lock the bag again. In another instance, a mail bag was missing and the postal inspectors repeatedly questioned all persons who might have had access to that mail bag. It was found, however, in the spring of the year by railroad track workers. It very evidently had been piled by the open door of the mail car, ready for delivery upon arrival at the railroad station, and had fallen out, unnoticed.

Many personal recollections, of course, crowd the mind of the author — like the time the wrong mail car was made ready for a run:

> On this particular early morning, the number 51 had two mail cars, one to be divided at Fitchburg and the other to continue on to Rutland. I was assigned to prepare (or dress) the bare car scheduled for Rutland. Dressing a car meant hanging the necessary mail bags on stationary racks, according to its own car plan. It took about an hour. When I was nearly finished, two men came through the door. They were Boston and Troy clerks, headed for Fitchburg! I had hung their mail bags using the Alburg and Boston plan for the car headed for Rutland. The car I was due to work in was several cars ahead.
>
> There are pleasant memories of the comradeship among the clerks. Sometimes scheduling was pretty tight. On an assignment from Alburg, Vermont, on a Friday evening I was to leave the run at Poughkeepsie on Saturday morning, leave Poughkeepsie on Saturday evening and arrive in Rutland on Sunday morning. I was then due in Troy, New York, on Sunday evening, so I "dead-headed" to Troy to start the assignment. This Troy to Middlebury run lasted a full week. But mail clerks had a way of taking care of each other. On my last return trip the other clerk working

with me allowed me to get off at Rutland. He could cope with the work from Rutland to Troy. It was Saturday. My next assignment was due to start from Keene, New Hampshire, on Monday morning. I drove to Keene and stayed with friends for a very welcome week-end of needed rest.

*THE DECLINE OF RAIL SERVICES*

Over the years the railroad companies had several secure sources of revenue. These included baggage, express, milk, mail and passengers. Some rails were laid for specific purposes, such as granite, marble, slate and lumber. Roads dependent upon the latter products were often revenue productive for only brief periods of time and were the first to be abandoned. Some, like the route from Bethel to Rochester, lasted only a short time. It came and went within 30 years. The Rutland Railroad, with tracks all the way from Ogdensburg to Chatham, New York, had a great source of revenue from transporting milk. This source started to dry up when it became more convenient to truck that product. Passenger service, a good source of revenue during World War II, declined steadily leaving only baggage, mail and express. For many years, even through the Great Depression, the United States government apparently wanted to remain with the railroads as a means of transporting and distributing mail. However, many problems developed with changed schedules and reduction in the number of train runs. The government was forced to utilize and rely upon other methods of moving the mail.

When the Rutland Railroad reduced train service, the government experimented with a highway post office service. The first of such runs in New England was established with a great fanfare on 25 January 1949 between Albany, New York, and Burlington, Vermont. During its tenure the government furnished a bus with an interior design similar to an RPO car. The set-up secured the mail from quick stops and vehicle motion. The government-owned vehicles were driven by mail employees themselves. The service, which extended into many parts of New England, disappeared without a murmur 19 years later on 12 April 1968 before the complete end of the RPO service. Later, the government contracted for similar vehicles from private business, which furnished the drivers.

The officials of the remaining Railway Mail Service were obliged to cut working hours for clerks and consolidate runs. The district superintendent did this in several ways: loading and unloading time was reduced; two clerks on the Boston to Burlington run were placed on turn-around runs from Boston to Rutland on a week-on, week-off schedule; then a third clerk, usually on that run, was assigned to an everyday run from Burlington to Rutland and return. When the run was eliminated, the organization had a surplus clerk.

Life was not easy for a district superintendent. He was not only accountable to division headquarters — and even to Washington — but he also had to appease the clerks when reorganizations of runs were necessary. The clerks did not have a union, as such, but there was a Railway Mail Association with an office in Washington. If clerks appealed to this office, the association personnel would contact the Vermont Congressman to intercede. Over the years satisfactory adjustments had usually been made.

With the curtailment of services the district superintendent, who had come from the ranks, returned to being a clerk. Once the 1929 depression began to have its effect on railroads, reorganizations of the mail service were rapid and naturally affected the clerks with the least seniority. World War II halted these changes for the length of the war, but a few short years after that it became obvious that more sweeping changes would take place.

RUTLAND
RAILROAD

*THE END OF THE SERVICE*

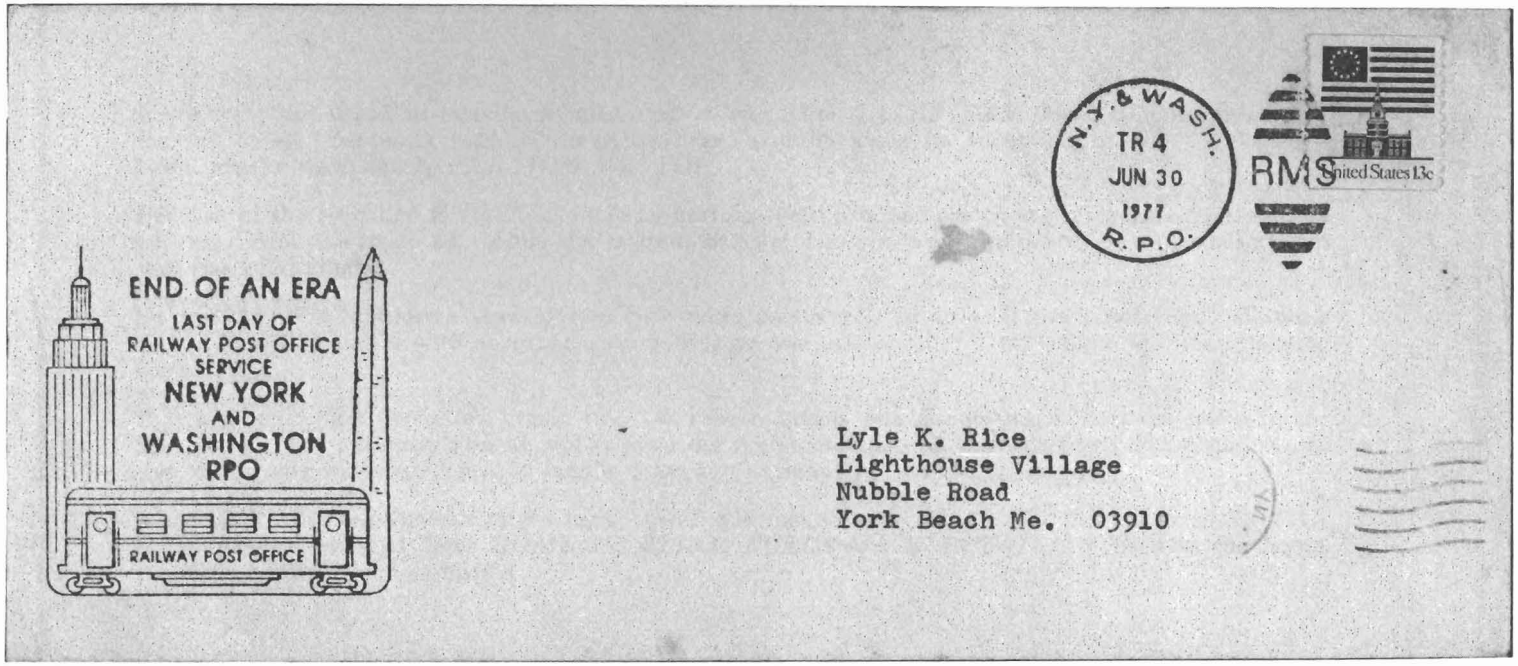
In the Rutland area, a strike of railroad employees brought about the end of passenger service and the end, as well, of the railway post office. At first, district and division officials tried to keep the possibility open for a return of the service, but it soon became obvious that it could not be revived.

With passenger rail service declining all around the country, it became a matter of time before many other railroads followed suit. The highway post office had not appeared to be a satisfactory answer. Airmail service had increased over the years and improved highways had speeded up the transportation of bulk mail.

With rail service phasing-out over the past 35 years, it became a problem of what to do with thousands of employees. Early retirement provided a temporary solution. The RPO clerks, in most cases, were offered a transfer to regular post offices. Some personnel in district offices became postal service officials.

A once-proud service that nationally employed as many as 25,000 men saw its end on 30 June 1977.

Glenn J. Hill (left) of Bristol and Lyle K. Rice (Rutland). Both men entered the Railway Mail Service in May, 1930. Both retired in July, 1965. Hill was a mobile supervisor. Rice was a supervisor in the Rutland Post Office.

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The Rutland Historical Society was founded in 1969 to preserve, study and disseminate the history of the original Town of Rutland as chartered by New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth in 1761, now comprised of the City of Rutland (1892) and the Towns of Rutland (1761), Proctor (1886) and West Rutland (1886). The Society maintains and operates The Rutland Museum in the historic Bank of Rutland building built in 1825, now owned by the City of Rutland, and The Vermont Farm and Rural Life Museum at the Vermont State Fair. A research library and the historical collections are maintained in the Museums and the historic Nickwackett Fire Station. Gifts or bequests of articles of historical interest or money are welcome at all times and are deductible for income tax purposes.

Membership in the Society is open to all upon payment of appropriate dues. (See the dues schedule below.) With membership, for its period, go a subscription to the Quarterly, any newsletters, a copy of the Annual Report, entitlement to vote at business meetings, and benefits accruing from support of the Society's Museums, exhibits, programs, collections and library. The year through which membership is paid and the category are noted on all address labels.

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